Henry Middleton del[t]

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IN LAND) OF CHANCEL: KEMPLEY CHURCH.

VI.—*A Description of the Paintings in the Church of Kempley, near Ross.* By John Thomas Micklethwaite, *Esq., F.S.A.*

Read January 18, 1877.

Kempley is about seven miles from Ross. It is in Gloucestershire, but on the borders of the county of Hereford, and was formerly in the diocese of Hereford, though now in that of Gloucester and Bristol. The church, which is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, is of the usual type of small parish churches of the Norman period, being made up of aisleless nave and chancel, the former about 34 feet by 19 feet, the latter about 18 feet by 14 feet, inside the walls. All the original walls remain, though most of the windows have been replaced by later ones, and a tower of the fifteenth century has been added at the west end. The chancel is roofed with a plain barrel-vault of rubble.

The paintings, which now give the church its chief interest, were covered with whitewash till 1871, when they were discovered by J. Henry Middleton, Esq. F.S.A. who carefully removed the whitewash and made the copies of the pictures, which he has placed at the service of our Society, and from which the illustrations of this paper are taken. (See Plate VI.) No attempt at *restoration* has been made, either in the pictures themselves or in the copies.

The most important paintings are in the chancel, where the whole surface of walls and vault has been covered with them, and the greater part remains in a state of very fair preservation, although a settlement in the vault has caused an ugly crack all through the principal picture. All the painting here appears to be of the early part of the twelfth century, contemporary with the building, or nearly so, and it is, I believe, by far the most perfect scheme of coloured decoration which remains to us of so early a date in England. The apse at Copford may have originally been somewhat similar, but there was much less of it, and repainting has now completed its archæological destruction. Both at Kempley and at Copford there was a unity of design not often found in old English wall-paintings. These generally represent a succession of subjects which, though they may have an iconological connection, and several are often run

together so as in a manner to make one picture, are really so many separate centres of interest, each one of about equal value with the others.

The subject here is our Lord seated in majesty and surrounded by the heavenly court, and the treatment is very closely what Durandus described as usual more than a century later:—

Picta (imago Salvatoris) ut residens in throno seu in solio excelso praesentem indicat Majestatem et Potestatem. . . . . Et quoniam, sicut ait Lucas, tunc videbunt filium hominis venientem in nube cum potestate magna et majestate, ideo ei quandoque circumcirca pinguntur Angeli, qui ei semper serviunt et adsistunt, et depinguntur cum sex alis secundum Esa: *Seraphin stabant juxta illud: Sex alae uni et sex alae alteri, et duabus velabant faciem ejus duabus pedes et duabus volabant.* Depinguntur etiam Angeli tanquam in aetate juvenili florentes, nunquam enim senescunt. Quandoque etiam circumpingitur Archangelus Michael draconem suppeditans. . . . . Quandoque etiam circumpinguntur xxiiij seniores, secundum visionem Joannis, in vestibus albis et coronis aureis. . . . . Si lampades adduntur dona Spiritus Sancti repraesentantur. Si mare vitreum, baptismus innuitur. Quandoque etiam circumpinguntur quatuor animalia secundum visionem Ezechielis et ejusdem Johannis. . . . . Hi sunt quatuor evangelistae, unde pinguntur cum libris in pedibus. . . . . Matthaeus figuram sortitur humanam, Marcus figuram tenet leonis. Hi ponuntur a dextris. . . . . Lucas vero vitulus est. . . . . Joannes autem figuratur aquila. . . . . Quandoque etiam circumpinguntur vel potius subpinguntur Apostoli, qui fuerunt testes ejus verbo et opere ad ultimum terrae. Et pinguntur criniti quasi Nazarei.[a]

So far Durandus. Let us now examine the "majesty" at Kempley. In the middle of the chancel ceiling is a figure of our Lord, considerably over life-size, seated on a curved red object, no doubt intended for a rainbow, and inclosed in a frame or glory of the usual three-lobed shape. A cruciform nimbus surrounds the head, and resting on the left knee is a tablet or open book, with the Greek names IHC : XPS :. Unfortunately the right side of the figure is too imperfect for us to see the position of the hand, but it would almost certainly be raised in benediction. The feet are to the east, and below them, just outside the frame, the border of which is continued round it, is a large circle much damaged by the settlement. I take this to represent the earth thus made the footstool of our Lord, but perhaps it is intended to represent the sea of glass, which Durandus mentions, whilst he does not mention the earth. Right and left of this circle are six-winged nimbed seraphs each bearing a scroll, and on either side of the principal figure stand the evangelistic beasts, which are in the order given them by Durandus. The ox, the eagle, and the lion hold open books. The other figure, which is issuing from a cloud, now shows no book, but part of it is indistinct,

[a] *Rat. Div. Off.* lib. i. cap. iii.

and there may have been a book originally. All four are nimbed, and the lion and eagle appear to have human faces, as may be occasionally seen in other representations.

Next, westwards, above the head of our Lord, are the sun and moon, the sun to the north and the moon to the south. The sun appears as a face surrounded by white rays, and the moon as a blue crescent inclosing a head. At the sides of these great lights are the seven candlesticks, four on the north and three on the south. They are not shown as of gold but are blue with white knops, and the form of the feet suggests that the originals from which they were copied were of iron. Each has a tall tapering candle. Next are two more seraphs, each holding a book in his western hand and in his eastern a lance with a square pennon. There is enough of eastern influence in the work to justify the suggestion that in these figures we have a reminiscence of the δορυφερούμενον of the Greek liturgy to which our Fellow, Mr. Edwin Freshfield, directs attention in Archæologia, vol. xliv. p. 386.

Beyond these seraphs and close to the chancel-arch are, on the south side, St. Peter nimbed, with key in right hand and book in left, and on the north a female figure also holding a book. She is without nimbus, but her head is muffled in a head-cloth or wimple, over which is a crown. I have little doubt that this is intended to represent Our Lady, the crown taking the place of the nimbus, as it often does in the Benedictional of St. Æthelwold,[a] the painting of which, though about a century and a half earlier, has much in common with that which we are examining, and may be said to belong to the same school. In the Benedictional are many figures with the nimbus and many with the crown, but the two are never used together, and women always have the wimple. The crown is always a circle with three upright ornaments or leaves, and such it has, I doubt not, been at Kempley, although the detail has perished.

All the figures mentioned thus far are painted on a red ground, forming a broad band along the top of the vault. This band is bounded by a white stripe on each side, and stopped east and west by bands of an interlaced pattern, which are carried all round against the end walls. The ground within the great glory is white, and stars or flowers of white and yellow are scattered between the figures on the red ground. The hair of all the figures which show any, both here and in the rest of the work, is light, with the one exception of our Lord, who is shown with hair of the same red as forms the ground outside the glory.

The side-walls of the chancel are divided each into two unequal parts by

[a] Archæologia, xxiv.

windows near the east end. The northern one remains unaltered. It has borders of red and yellow to the inner and outer arches, and the splay of the jambs and arch is covered with a mosaic pattern of red, blue, and white. The southern window has been altered and enlarged, but there remains above it, as there does above the opposite one, a painted canopy of walls and towers.

West of the windows are painted on each side six arch-headed niches in which are seated the twelve apostles. They are all nimbed and hold books. St. Peter, who occupies the eastern place on the north side, is distinguished by a large key, which he holds under his left arm. The others have nothing by which they can be recognised. Similarly in the Benedictional just quoted St. Peter alone of the apostles has any distinguishing badge. He has there two keys, which seem to hang from a small cross which he holds in his left hand. The elaborate quasi-heraldic system, which gives a special badge to each saint, is of later growth. It began by drawing martyrs holding the instruments of their suffering. This is mentioned by Durandus in the latter part of the thirteenth century, and badges other than these are rarely found during the fourteenth. But during the fifteenth century, and especially late in it, many were used, the explanation of which must be sought in symbolism or legend.

All the apostles direct their attention towards the figure of our Lord. Under their feet has been an ornamental band or fringe, about five feet from the floor, some of which remains, but all painting below it seems to have gone.

Eastward of the two side-windows are a pair of niches rather wider than those occupied by the apostles. In each is a figure without nimbus and having a staff in each hand, one over the shoulder, and one used as a support, like the *bourdon* of a pilgrim. Both wear long tunics with mantles fastened on the shoulder, and he on the south has a hat of the orthodox pilgrim form. These two figures, having neither nimbus nor crown, are probably not saints. I take them to represent either the donors of the pictures or some other benefactors of the church. The custom of thus introducing figures of donors was common before the date of this work, and continued throughout the middle ages.

The east end of the chancel has one window with a round head concentric with the vault, and below it is a band of the same interlacing pattern as is found on the ceiling. Over the window are three roundels containing each a nimbed angel holding a scroll in both hands, as if singing from it, and on each side of the window has been a large arched niche. There are large trefoils in the spandrils, between the roundels and the niche-heads, each having a blue and two

yellow leaves. Of the northern niche little remains, but in the other is a very perfect figure of a bishop. He is habited in mass vestments, and his right hand is raised in benediction. In his left he holds a crozier.[a] The chasuble is dark-blue lined with yellow. It has a broad grey orphrey down the front, and is short in front and long behind. Chasubles are often represented thus in works of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and I am not satisfied whether the shortness in front is due to the shape of the vestment or to some way of looping it up. It cannot always be due to the unskilfulness of the artists. The oldest chasubles which remain are conical,[b] and as long in front as they are behind, as those used by the Greeks are to this day; and many passages in old writers seem to refer to this shape. And when, late in the twelfth century, the shape began to be changed for the sake of convenience, the reduction was made not in front but at the sides. On the whole, therefore, it seems probable that the shortness in the pictures comes from the way in which the vestment was worn.

Round the neck of the bishop at Kempley is a broad band coloured pale-red. I think it belongs to the chasuble and not to the amice, as it would do at a later date. The dalmatic is white and reaches to the feet, so that the alb and stole are not visible. It has a broad band of yellow round the bottom. The maniple is blue, very narrow, and with expanding ends of white, with a row of tassels on each, as on the stole of St. Thomas of Canterbury at Sens. It is worn on the wrist after the modern manner and not on the hand. The two fashions seem to have existed side by side for a long time, for the later is shown in the Benedictional of St. Æthelwold, and the earlier in the figure of Stigand on the Bayeux tapestry. The mitre of our bishop is not white as we should expect, but pale-red like the collar of the chasuble. It is of the earliest low form with the points imperfectly developed, and appears to have something more than the usual fillets hanging behind, or perhaps it is worn over a coif, such as is shown in the enamelled figure of Bishop Ulger,[c] formerly in the church of St. Maurice at

[a] It has been the fashion for some years to use the word *crozier* for the cross which was carried before archbishops, and which effigies sometimes show in their hands. But it belongs properly to the bishop's crook.

[b] I can find no real evidence for the flat circle with the hole in the middle, which is said to have been the earliest form of the chasuble. The conical shape seems to be primitive, and it was used in both East and West till the middle of the twelfth century.

[c] Ulger died in 1149. The tomb is figured by M. Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire du Mobilier*, vol. ii. p. 224.

Angers. The crozier is a simple crook like that of Bishop Flambard of Durham, lately found in his coffin there, and exhibited to our Society in 1875 by the Rev. J. T. Fowler, F.S.A. (See Archæologia. vol. xlv. p. 388.)

At the feet of the bishop is on his right side what looks like a small black pitcher, and is possibly intended for a cruet; and on the left is a yellow circle inclosing a blue cross, the field of the circle being the red of the ground. This looks very like a dedication cross, and the position is a likely one. There is in the collection of the Society a drawing of the figure of a bishop painted on the east wall of Barfreston church, in a position exactly corresponding to this, except that it is on the north side. The figure is of the thirteenth century, and, seemingly painted over the lower part of it, is what there can be little doubt is a dedication cross. The cross at Kempley has been compared to the two crosses at the feet of a rude figure of a bishop on a tympanum at South Ferriby church, Lincolnshire, the date of which may be not far from that of our paintings.

The colouring is continued on the east side of the chancel-arch, which is of two plain square orders. The outer order is decorated with a mosaic pattern arranged in zig-zags. The inner has ten yellow roundels bordered with red, which, in spite of their number, I think may have contained signs of the zodiac. The ground-colour of the arch is white.

There is a good deal of painting remaining in the nave, but it is neither in such good condition nor has it been so fully examined as that in the chancel. It is of various dates, and I shall now only describe that on the east wall above and about the chancel-arch, which alone appears to be of the same work as that in the chancel. The chancel-arch is inclosed in a sort of square frame filled with a mosaic pattern of red and white triangles. Above this is our Lord seated on a semicircular rainbow. The upper part is cut off by a modern ceiling, above which the painting may possibly remain. There have been figures attending on our Lord, but scarcely anything can be made out with certainty except an angel blowing a large trumpet, which is twice bent back upon itself. On each side of the chancel-arch has been painted a niche like those at the east end, and in the southern one a nimbed figure can still be traced. This and a corresponding one on the other side probably represented the saints to whom the two altars at the sides of the chancel-arch were dedicated.

It is satisfactory to know that these pictures, which for antiquity and completeness are, I believe, without rivals in England, are now well cared for. They

are not to be restored, and the walls of the chancel have been well buttressed, to prevent further spreading.

Mr. Middleton, F.S.A. contributes the following on the method used in the painting:—

"With regard to the technical process by which these paintings were executed, we may, I think, be certain that they are not true frescoes, that is, that they were not executed on freshly laid and wet stucco; first, because the colour is merely superficial, and has not sunk into and become incorporated with the stucco; and secondly, from the absence of any trace of 'fresco edges,' as they are called, that is, the scarcely perceptible lines that separate the patch of stucco laid one day from that of the next and succeeding days. For, as it was necessary that the colour should be laid on wet and perfectly fresh stucco, it was of course needful that only as much stucco should be applied to the wall at once as the painter could cover with one day's work, and in very hot weather even less. Any superfluity of stucco that had got dry and set before the colour was applied had to be cut off, and a fresh patch laid on.

"It was this peculiarity in fresco-painting, requiring great *verve* and decision on the part of the painter, and the almost impossibility of altering what was done without actually cutting the piece out, that contributed so largely to its breadth and boldness of effect, and thus made it so successful a means of producing a form of decoration at once monumental in character and harmonious with its structural surroundings.

"It must not, however, be understood that a fresco could not be re-touched and much of its high finish added to it after the first dashing application of the colour, for on most of the great works of this sort of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it is easy to distinguish a second process, by which numbers of fine lines were hatched on to the surface of the stucco, and laid over the first broad tints. In many instances, as, for example, in Luca Signorelli's magnificent series of frescoes in the Duomo of Orvieto, representing the coming of Anti-Christ, the Last Day, and the Resurrection, and in Michel Angelo's paintings on the vault of the Sistine Chapel, these finishing touches in ordinary tempera play a very important part, both in modifying the masses of light and shade and in strengthening or defining the outlines of the figures.

"Unfortunately, the word 'fresco' is commonly used rather vaguely, and is often employed, even by the Italians themselves, to mean simply any tempera painting on stucco: they distinguish the true fresco-painting on wet plaster by calling it 'fresco buono,' and the other sort, on dry plaster, they call 'fresco

secco,' which is really a self-contradictory phrase. It would be better always to use the word in its true and literal meaning of painting on wet or 'fresh' plaster.

"I think it is doubtful if the art of real fresco-painting was ever practised in England. I have carefully examined a large number of early paintings on the walls of English churches, which are far commoner than is generally supposed, but have never succeeded in discovering an example of the real fresco, or 'fresco buono.'

"The Kempley paintings, then, were executed on dry stucco, in tempera, with probably a medium of egg and vinegar, or perhaps size."

EAST END OF CHANCEL, KEMPLEY.
Scale ½ of an inch to a foot.